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RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAR 9747  
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RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 0164  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000708

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EC](#)  
SUBJECT: GOE TO DECLARE EMERGENCY TO CLEAR HIGHWAYS

REF: QUITO 694

Classified By: CDA Jefferson Brown for reason 1.4 (b&d).

¶1. (C) Summary: With indigenous roadblocks continuing in several provinces, a top aide to the President said Palacio had decided late on March 21 to declare an emergency in three central provinces and part of another, to permit the military to begin to clear the roads for commerce. Indigenous CONAIE protesters were again few in Quito during the day, with a group of 800 reaching the Congress, but more were said to be marching towards the capital. Unions, campesinos, and evangelical indigenous are reportedly planning separate anti-FTA demonstrations in coming weeks. Presidential communication secretary Proano publicly denied Colombian press reports that military officers were plotting Palacio's removal. End Summary.

Road Blocks in Provinces...

¶2. (U) As of 15H00 on March 21, roads remained blocked in Cotopaxi, Chimborazo, Imbabura, and Canar provinces. Indigenous in Morona Santiago province also joined the protests with no public transportation in the province. In Riobamba, Chimborazo province, indigenous organized by prefect Mariano Curicama have closed the highway connecting Riobamba and Guayaquil in nine places. Press reported that 3,000 indigenous from Cotopaxi province would march towards Quito beginning March 21. Meanwhile, President Palacio held a Cabinet meeting to discuss GOE options.

...Cause GOE to Declare Emergency

¶3. (C) CDA and PolChief met with Presidential Secretary and top political advisor Jose Modesto Apolo after the Cabinet meeting. Apolo, visibly stressed and worried, initially indicated that no decision had been taken regarding a state of emergency, and expressed concern that doing so would create risks of violence which could inflame the protesters. Emphasizing the risks to GOE stability of indigenous mobilization in Quito, Apolo floated several ideas he said he had not yet shared with the president. First was the possibility of an OAS visit, to encourage indigenous to desist from road blockages. The second was the possibility of offering one or two carefully chosen indigenous representatives a chance to participate in the final round of FTA talks. The latter was raised in the context of dividing the indigenous movement while disarming its charges of lack of transparency in FTA talks. Apolo was then called away. On returning, he said a state of emergency would be declared

in Chimborazo, Cotopaxi, Tungurahua and two cantons in Pichincha province. (Note: A state of emergency in these locations would permit the government to use the military to clear the Pan-American highway.)

#### Small Numbers of Indigenous Protesters in Quito

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¶4. (U) Street protest action in Quito remained sparse but growing. Approximately 800 indigenous marched from Arbolito Park, near the Embassy, to the Congress building at approximately 14H00. CONAIE leader Humberto Cholango announced that on March 20, indigenous met with civil society groups, including anti-FTA group "Ecuador Decide" led by presidential pre-candidate Eduardo Delgado, to discuss an anti-FTA alliance.

#### Separate Anti-FTA Marches Planned

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¶5. (U) Jaime Arciniega, head of the umbrella union CEOSL, told us on March 21, that the labor movement had decided to support a march with evangelical indigenous group FEINE and campesino group FENOCIN, to demand a popular referendum on the FTA. Arciniega said a date had not yet been set for this march. Arciniega said he had proposed forums with civil society to discuss the FTA to include FTA negotiators. He said the march would not use the same tactics as CONAIE--there would be no roadblocks, only a peaceful march in Quito. Press also reported that campesinos in Guayas province associated with FENOCIN have announced they will march to Quito to protest the FTA. So far there have been virtually no protests in Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city and major commercial center.

#### GOE Denies Colombian Press Reports Of Military Unrest

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¶6. (SBU) On March 20, Presidential Communication Secretary Enrique Proano publicly denied reports in Colombian news magazine "Semana" that a group of military officers are seeking to remove Palacio from office. The report claimed a "high level military source" had reported that military officers are unhappy with low salaries and with GOE restraint in the face of Colombian border incursions. So far, there have been no signs from within the military confirming this report. We have no indications from our military contacts to corroborate the prospect of extra-constitutional actions on their part.

#### Comment

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¶7. (C) The state of emergency reflects GOE commitment to stand firm against protester disruption of commerce. It heightens risk by testing military restraint but also appeals to public frustration with protester tactics. Enforcing the emergency could heighten tensions in the provinces, but might help prevent protesters from threatening GOE stability in the capital.

BROWN